

Slow Planning?

How time is manipulated and shapes planning practice

OVERVIEW

Little attention has been paid by researchers to how time is deployed and managed in planning practice, yet it has become an increasingly important tool for governing the planning system in England and beyond. The regulation of time affects interests differently and the temporal governance of planning – what we term ‘timescaping’ – can have profound consequences for policy and communities.

A key focal point for highlighting a long-running situation where time is manipulated to serve political interests is the ‘Project Speed’ agenda pursued in England, which has deployed multiple policy and reform efforts to service economic growth through timescaping attempts.

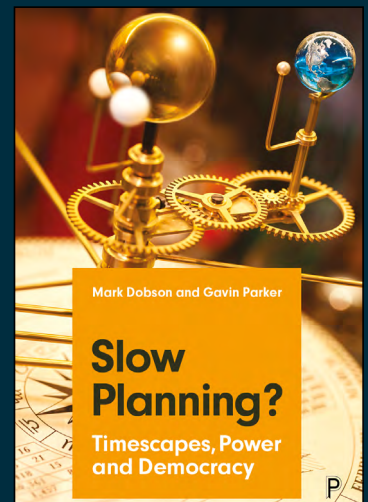
The key arguments of the book are that:

- governments and politicians make extensive use of temporal rhetoric when discussing planning;
- speed has been prioritised and as such, time to deliberate and plan has been squeezed using a variety of strategies;
- preferential times are afforded to some activities and actors where they align with a wider speed-growth agenda;
- some interests are marginalised by the application of temporal governance arrangements, raising questions over inclusion and legitimacy, as well as outcomes;
- there are demonstrable benefits of ‘slow planning’ for key participants, such as for community participation and long-term sustainable development; and
- the principle of ‘proper time’ should be woven into planning practices.

CONTEXT

The book is a deep exploration of how questions of time and its organisation affect planning practice, and is aimed at public and private planning practitioners, national and local politicians and policy makers involved in planning, academics and students studying planning and related disciplines.

The book and its findings are important because ‘Project Speed’ appears to forget the needs of the public and the substantive goals of planning as a professional activity. The current timescape of planning practice in England can propel decision makers to hasten practices under the assumption that speed is required for economic growth, yet this can erode public interest considerations, community participation and trust. We argue that developers are less concerned with time per se, but instead with certainty and the ability to negotiate effectively. This makes the work highly relevant as governments struggle to maintain public trust, work collaboratively and implement their agendas while also delivering publicly acceptable growth.



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FINDINGS

Applying insights from social theory, the book assesses the English planning system from the perspective of time and timescaping, where a range of temporal strategies and (chrono)technologies abound. The numerous substantive applications of temporal governance applied to planning in England are discussed to build a picture of the timescaping of planning practice.

The main findings are that:

- control of time in planning is tantamount to control over planning;
- time and its deployment in planning discourse and practice shows how powerful narratives of 'Project Speed' can belie the nature of the problems faced and the ability to generate appropriate solutions;
- time is not neutral but constitutive of power relations, which shape practice;
- each actor has their own proper time when participating in planning, and prioritising one set of time interests has a knock-on effect on all others in the timescape. Moreover:
 - Planners feel squeezed between governmental requirements, public pressure and developer demands with existing temporal governance arrangements failing all concerned.
 - Developers much prefer to agree timings that are realistic and reflect the needs of all parties and the circumstances to reduce uncertainty.
- planning is participatory, but the time squeezes on plan and decision making undermine wider participation and deliberation, as well as impact the substantive aims of the planning system, which are ostensibly to serve public interest and deliver sustainable development;
- more reflection and research are needed on the role of time in shaping planning and on how timescapes are experienced by different actors, as well as the political context shaping the construction of plans and policies.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The book highlights how efforts to organise planning using deadlines, limits or other 'timescaping' actions have created a situation where planning itself is being squeezed.

To rebalance this focus on 'Project Speed', we recommend:

- a more considered, time-aware approach to practice and that governments create 'proper time' for different aspects of planning activity, which consider the impacts of timescaping on all involved in planning;
- a more nuanced understanding of the needs of planning and of particular actor groups and specific issues or activities involved in planning;
- the development of 'proper' planning that features not only considered deceleration but also improved resources, tools, institutional structures and clear organising principles;
- time and resources for proper democratic and technical oversight of policy and development, as well as the introduction of new forms of regulation;
- policy moves away from standard deadlines and the near obsession with development over a set time period, focusing instead on need, quality and appropriateness to the complexity of the project or issues under consideration;
- that policy makers work towards a co-evolved timescape that enables purposive aims of planning to be realised democratically and ensures that quality of life is improved, inequalities addressed, healthy outcomes fostered and the environment enhanced.